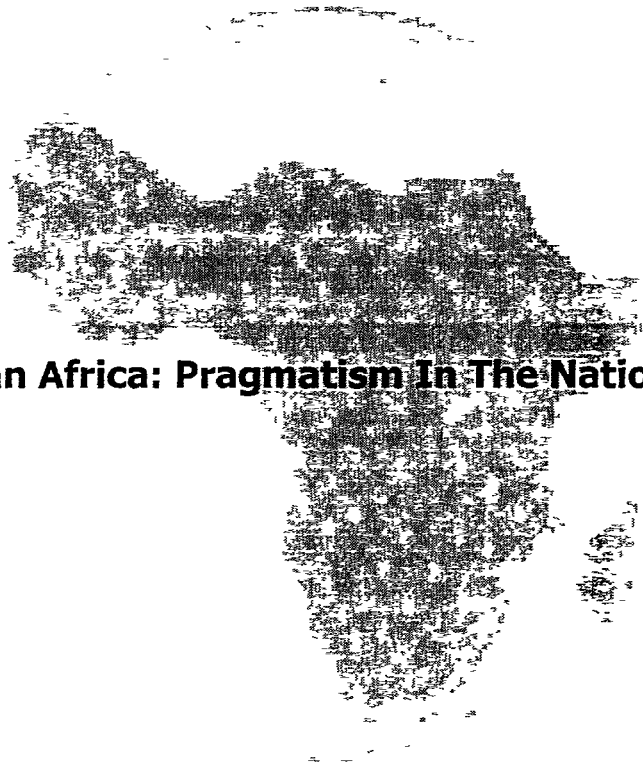


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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE



Sub-Saharan Africa: Pragmatism In The National Interest

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Sub-Saharan Africa is a region of the world where geographic isolation and unsurpassed natural resources conspired for centuries to make it a victim of, rather than a participant in, the advancement of industrial age civilization. The legacies of that victimization are still evident in the chaos that prevails as Africans attempt to accomplish in decades what took the rest of the world centuries. Today, the same combination of isolation and economic potential pulls United States policy in two directions. Sub-Saharan Africa's isolation leaves it devoid of any vital national interests. Yet, its natural resources and potential markets make a stable and prosperous Africa highly desirable. Add in the American humanitarian zeal for simply doing good and you get an American foreign policy that, for reasons both altruistic and self-serving, reflects our desire to assist African nations in catching up to the rest of the world.

U S foreign policy is based on an assessment of our interests and the amount of resources available. One category of interests - *national interests* - are truly vital in that the consequences of a policy failure could effect our territorial integrity, economic survival or our way of life. Another category - those areas of concern *in the national interest* - is less important. Successful policies here might enhance our prosperity or prestige, but the consequences of failure would not be great. Current conditions in Africa place U S interests in the second category. Given the many vital U S interests in other parts of the globe, the amount of resources available to support the U S role in Africa is limited. Based on this assessment, foreign policymakers need to develop a more pragmatic approach towards Africa that will best apply the limited U S resources available in order to maximize U S interests there.

Most official policy statements are quite blunt about the fact that there are no vital U S interests in sub-Saharan Africa. The Defense Department's *United States Security Strategy for*

Sub-Saharan Africa asserts the U S has no vital interests in sub-Saharan Africa¹ The 1997 *Strategic Assessment* by the National Defense University states, "with the exception of South Africa, the region does not figure centrally in U S international political and geostrategic calculations "² Even the President's *National Security Strategy* lists Africa last in its section on "Integrated Regional Approaches "³

However, the absence of vital national interests does not mean the U S has no stake in the success of sub-Saharan Africa There are tremendous economic, political, and military problems in the region, the resolution of which will significantly enhance our own prosperity and security The consequences of failing to solve these problems may not be great enough to make them a threat to our vital national interests, but the rewards of success make solving them worthy goals

Our economic interests reflect the great potential within the continent of Africa The 1997 National Security Strategy notes,

The more than 600 million people in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) represent one of the world's largest remaining untapped markets The United States exports more to SSA than to all of the former Soviet Union combined, yet the U S enjoys only seven-percent market share in Africa⁴

The rich natural resources, tremendous potential labor supply and vast export market make Africa very attractive for U S economic interests⁵ However, despite all the promise and appeal for the U S , the historic mismanagement of business, industry, investment and agriculture in Africa has established a very poor track record for sustained success in economic programs Most countries run a centralized, state-sponsored economy that inequitably rewards those in

¹ US Department of Defense, *United States Security Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: US Dept of Defense Office of International Security Affairs, August 1995), 3

² Institute for National Strategic Studies *Strategic Assessment 1997* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 157

³ The White House *A National Security Strategy For a New Century* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997) 27-28

⁴ *Ibid* , 28

positions of power and wealth to the detriment of the working class. Individual Africans cannot share in the vision of a bright economic future because they are excluded from it by design. This policy, in turn, discourages foreign capital investment in developing a viable economic infrastructure to provide opportunities to grow, profit, reinvest and capitalize on what Africa has to offer. This troubling situation in the economic area of U.S. interest leads naturally to a companion interest in the political climate in Africa.

Just as economic growth is not possible without sound investment and good planning, it also cannot succeed without a stable political environment that supports and empowers it. The political reality of most African nations is the opposite of "what works" — small groups of well-connected, wealthy elite who exercise power through inefficient, ineffective and incompetent single-party systems. The U.S. has real interests in seeing political reform that encourages the establishment of true market-based economies where workers and organizations are free to develop Africa's untapped economic resources. The vast potential that lies just over the horizon will be realized when the economic power of each state is unleashed from its political handlers. Successful economic or political reforms by themselves do not guarantee success in both areas. Rather, they must be developed in tandem for the status quo that exists in Africa to ever change.

Military interests for the U.S. include transnational threats, security of U.S. citizens and humanitarian/disaster relief. The only known nuclear power is South Africa, but they have renounced the use of nuclear weapons. Drugs, terrorism, crime and environmental issues are country-specific threats that are not direct threats to our domestic security, but whose long-term and region-wide effects would require taking action in our national interest. However, the immediate U.S. military interests include the security of U.S. citizens working and living in

³ Percentage of world's supply of uranium (30%), gold (50%), phosphates (50%), coal (7.5%), petroleum (8%), natural gas (12%). George Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 5-6.

Africa and possible humanitarian/disaster relief missions. Based on the frequency of internal conflicts in the African states that have U.S. citizens living there, the U.S. must be ready to extract its personnel on very short notice.⁶ The tragic effects of both man-made and natural disasters on destitute African countries, combined with our disdain for the accompanying human suffering, will find American military forces involved in more crisis-response situations.⁷ While not as key to future promise as the economic and political areas of interest, these military interests will be a more direct concern to U.S. strategists in the event of an internal conflict or natural disaster.

Overall, improving these three areas of interest—economic, political and military—will together achieve the most critical goal of U.S. foreign policy and national strategy on the African continent: stability. The ultimate success in realizing the shared interests of the U.S. and Africa cannot result from short-term solutions to deep-seated problems. Only when the internal political, economic and security situations of individual states are stabilized can true long-term, productive engagement with Africa occur.

The end of the Cold War was a mixed blessing for the region. On the positive side, it removed the proclivity of superpower actors to use the region for surrogate conflict, reduced excessive levels and types of military aid, and made UN peacekeeping operations more palatable. On the negative side, it decreased the political and economic interest in the region, lowered levels of international aid, left a small constituency for U.S. action and aid, and released ethnic, religious and tribal tensions previously constrained by superpower imperatives.⁸ The

⁶ History in this decade alone shows Noncombatant Evacuation Operations in Liberia (1990, 1996), Somalia (1992), Zaire/Congo (1991), Sierra Leone (1992, 1997), Rwanda (1994) and Central African Republic (1996). Dan Henk, "U.S. National Interests in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Parameters* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Winter 1997/1998), 10.

⁷ Somalia (1992), Rwanda (1994), and Central Africa (1996) represent humanitarian missions undertaken thus far in this past six years. Ibid.

⁸ INSS, *Strategic Assessment 1997*, 157.

resulting chaotic mix of success and failure is most notable for its inconsistency and unpredictability

Islamic extremism, civil war, ethnic disorder, refugees and displaced persons add to existing problems. Islamic extremists are aligning themselves with nations, such as Sudan, that the United States brands as terrorists, thus hampering future development of certain regions. Since 1980, all ten major regional conflicts were waged within a country or a territory between rival government factions or the armed forces of one or more internal resistance movements. The result was a dramatic increase in refugees and internally displaced persons. As of December 1995, Africa had 5.2 million refugees and almost 10.2 million internally displaced persons. Respectively, this represents 34% and 48% of the world's totals and constitutes tremendous economic and financial burdens on the world's poorest region.⁹

Rwanda, Burundi, and Angola are examples of potential flash points in the region. In Burundi, the U.S. objectives are the transition to a democratic government and rights for minorities. The U.S. stopped developmental aid to Burundi because of war and human rights abuses, but humanitarian aid and aid to promote a democratic government still continue. A small International Military Education and Training program was reactivated in 1996 to encourage greater professionalism within the military, to increase the understanding of the military's role in a democracy, and to gain respect for human rights.¹⁰ The unresolved Angolan conflict exemplifies African civil wars fought for mainly political advantage. Throughout the war, the U.S. provided military equipment and support to offset Soviet and Cuban influences. Today, the

⁹ Ibid. 158-159

¹⁰ Ibid. 162

U S has invested much diplomatic capital in helping to bring peace to Angola, no doubt in large part to the 5% of U S oil imports Angola provides ¹¹

In Liberia and Somalia, ethnic rivalries expanding beyond the civil war phase have destroyed the state. In Liberia, vicious warlords now control the economy. The U S lost an estimated \$400 million in facilities. Though the U S had strong ties with Liberia when the civil war broke out, the U S did not intervene. Consequently, the U S maintained Naval and Marine forces offshore for long periods and conducted several non-combatant evacuation operations. In Somalia, the famine has ended, but anarchy still prevails. The international community does not deem Somalia deserving of any further political or social engineering ¹²

In Nigeria, the Gambia, Niger and Burundi, the military has reversed the democratic process. In Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Sudan, internal conflicts delay or disrupt the movement toward freely elected democratic governments ¹³

However, all the news in sub-Saharan Africa is not bad. Economically, a reversal of the negative trend from 1980-1992 is a reality. Recently, the economic success of a number of African countries is attributed to conditions of security and stability, a policy environment conducive to investment and growth, and government implementation of macroeconomic reforms. These reforms include monetary reforms in regard to exports, privatization and the opening of markets, allowing market forces to determine exchange rates and reductions in the cost of the public sector and budget deficits ¹⁴. These encouraging signs now raise questions about the current and future U S policy towards Africa.

¹¹ Ibid , 162-163

¹² Ibid , 163-167

¹³ Ibid .58

¹⁴ Ibid , 158

Current United States policy in the region has two objectives to accelerate African integration into the world economy and to protect U S citizens and interests from threats emanating from the region ¹⁵ The U S hopes to bring Africa into the global trading system by promoting sustainable growth and development which, in turn, demands we promote democracy and human rights and attempt to resolve conflicts through collective security arrangements A 1997 economic program listed four specific initiatives to further this objective increasing African access to U S markets through lowering tariff barriers, increasing technical assistance, increasing private investment, and forgiving bilateral debt while encouraging elimination of multi-lateral debt ¹⁶

To protect its citizens and interests from regional threats the United States is working on multiple fronts It has led the way in establishing Africa as a nuclear free zone It is actively encouraging AIDS prevention Drug enforcement officials are engaged in South Africa and Nigeria to stem the flow of drugs from those countries into the United States Work continues on a regional level to address such wide-ranging issues as deforestation and the establishment and support of the African Crisis Response Initiative ¹⁷

The objectives and methods of U S policy in sub-Saharan Africa are consistent with our interests in the region The emphasis on economic development and the internal conditions to sustain it is appropriate in a region where there is no threat to vital U S national interests Addressing transnational threats is also consistent with our policy in other regions Yet, two aspects of our policy limit its potential effectiveness our insistence that democracy is the only acceptable form of government and our failure to sufficiently prioritize our limited resources

¹⁵ Susan E Rice "A New Partnership for the 21st Century" Department of State Bureau of African Affairs (Washington D C November 14, 1997). p 2,[database on-line] available at http://www.state.gov/www/regions/africa/rice_971114.html

¹⁶ Ibid , 3

United States foreign policy in Africa must recognize the primacy of our economic interests. From that recognition, it follows that the advancement of democracy in Africa should not be a centerpiece of our policy, for it is not the only environment in which we can further our economic interests. Democracy is not an end, but a means to an end, which might just as easily be reached by other paths. We must abandon our most cherished belief that only a democracy can lead to a better life for a country's population. A cold, hard look at the disastrous democracies in Serbia and Haiti should have led us to that conclusion long ago.

Instead, we must judge African governments on a more pragmatic criteria. Primarily, are they improving the general welfare of their people? This involves such objective criteria as per capita income, health, education and human rights. It is an analytical failure for us to assume one-party democracies, autocracies, or even military dictatorships are incapable of improving the welfare of their people. A valid analysis demands we judge governments on results rather than format. Once the United States frees itself from the ideological constraints of promoting democracies, it will be free to adopt more pragmatic policies recognizing that while its national security interests in Africa are few, its potential economic interests are great. In today's resource constrained world, such a realistic approach will ensure we prioritize our efforts to have the greatest impact.

A pragmatic, resource-limited, and economics-oriented foreign policy would feature two pillars: a concentration on lead countries within sub-regions, and the prioritization of effort. By attempting to employ a limited set of monetary and human resources to assist every African nation, we will inevitably spread ourselves so thin we cannot make a difference anywhere. Instead, we should focus on the politically and economically strongest and most stable nations in each of four sub-Saharan Africa regions: West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, and Southern

¹⁷ Ibid. -

Africa We should make a concerted effort with all our available tools to assist and encourage these nations in becoming responsible "islands of excellence" whose success could spread throughout the region

The criteria for designation as a lead nation should not, within obvious limits, rest on the level of democracy, but rather on the strength of its economy and the stability of its government In West Africa, the lead nation should be Ghana In Eastern Africa, Kenya, despite its current problems, is the best candidate In Southern Africa, South Africa, with its economic strength, is the obvious choice In Central Africa, no country stands out as a model of economic or political stability, but Uganda, in the midst of promising reform, should be the lead country

Designating lead countries will expose us to accusations of having an unfair, exclusionary policy This is a natural reaction, especially among those nations that fail to meet the criteria of a lead nation However, over time, these excluded nations will see how accomplishing internal economic and political reform can lead to the critical assistance they require This policy does not mean we will ignore other African countries It simply means we must prioritize our efforts, applying the limited instruments of assistance—humanitarian aid, government transfers, and foreign direct investment—to the nations where they will have the greatest impact

The status of African nations as Failed States, Struggling States, or Emerging/Successful States should be the determining factor in what type of assistance the United States promotes Failed States would be limited to humanitarian assistance and the encouragement and support of non-governmental organizations As we have all too often discovered, in states where chaos reigns, monetary assistance is often diverted, civic programs fail when simple survival is a daily challenge and private investment is risky at best Struggling States, displaying a tenuous

political or economic stability, would be the prime target for direct government programs designed to lock in their successes and nudge them towards open societies and free market economies. This would be done regardless of whatever form of government they choose, democratic or otherwise. Finally, Emerging/Successful states are those where there is sufficient rule of law and economic predictability to make them attractive targets for private sector investment. These are the states we want to encourage and reward, both because they provide the maximum benefit for their own people and because they contribute most to the advancement of our national economic interests.

In the end, the United States must distinguish between our *national interests* and what is *in our national interest*. This subtle, yet critical, distinction should shape our foreign policy in Africa. *National interests*—where the consequences of failure threaten our nation's survival or prosperity—demand our action. Issues *in the national interest*—where success would enhance our security or prosperity, but for which the consequences of failure are not a threat—invite our action. Our stake in Africa is clearly in the latter category. Our foreign policy should, therefore, accept the invitation to action, recognizing that our conscience will compel us to act, but more urgent demands on our resources will compel us to make hard choices. A foreign policy focusing maximum resources on lead nations and prioritizing our efforts towards other nations can meet the demands of our conscience and our wallets.